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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006874

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ECON KWBG IS TS EG IE AG JO IR GOI EXTERNAL ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS
SUBJECT: (C) FM SHALOM DISCUSSES SECURITY CONCERNS,
RELATIONS WITH MUSLIM COUNTRIES WITH A/S WELCH

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch on December 8 met with FM Silvan Shalom to discuss regional and Israeli-Palestinian issues. Shalom expressed concern about the security situation, claiming that there had been an increase in infiltrations by terrorists and weapons smuggling since the opening of the passages. While reiterating U.S. support for Israel's right to defend itself, A/S Welch cautioned that retaliation against terrorists should be calibrated to not adversely affect people who simply want to trade or travel. Shalom detailed progress in relations with Muslim countries and asked for U.S. help in promoting such ties. End summary.

Concern about the Security Situation

12. (C) NEA Assistant Secretary David Welch met with FM Silvan Shalom December 8 to discuss regional and Israeli-Palestinian issues. Shalom expressed concern about the current security situation. He said that Islamic Jihad continues to fire rockets into Israel and claimed that the smuggling of weapons and infiltration from Egypt to Gaza and into Israel has increased since the opening of the passages. The Netanya suicide bomber had, he said, entered Israel through one of the "gates" (in the barrier in the West Bank). Shalom said that it is difficult to check 100 percent of all vehicles entering Israel. He noted that he had raised this problem in meetings with Abbas in Tunis and had warned him that Hamas could undermine the existence of the Palestinian Authority (PA). Pointing to the example of Hizballah, Shalom cautioned that Hamas could become more powerful following the Palestinian elections. A/S Welch asserted that the GOI's withdrawal from Gaza presents the Palestinians with a great opportunity for progress, but, at the same time, the security of Israel must be maintained. The U.S. publicly and privately supports Israel's right to defend itself, he said. A/S Welch noted, however, that in bringing the terrorists to account, it is important not to punish those people who just want to trade or travel.

Relations with Muslim Countries

13. (C) Shalom expressed great satisfaction with his visit to Tunis and detailed how well his hosts and the other guests treated him. He pointed out that he shared a table with heads of state or government from Algeria, Lebanon, Sudan, and Qatar as well as with Mahmud Abbas, wryly noting that no one, except Abbas, spoke to him. Shalom noted the progress in relations between Israel and Arab and Muslim states; previously, Arab representatives would leave the hall if a representative of Israel was addressing the gathering, but not now, he said. Shalom said that currently there are many opportunities to improve relations with Muslim states. He said that Israel would like to start a dialogue with former Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri's son, Lebanon's Druze community, and other moderates in that country. Shalom said the new president of Mauritania has said that he wants to continue relations with Israel.

14. (C) Shalom claimed that Iraqi representatives have expressed an interest in having relations with Israel. Israel, however, is very cautious, believing that the time might be too soon for the Iraqis to take this step without causing themselves further problems. He asked for U.S. help in letting Israel know when would be the right time to take up the Iraqi offer. He said that now would be a good time to try to upgrade relations with Pakistan, the Gulf countries, and Morocco. Shalom said that other countries (Jordan) follow the lead of Egypt, which has good relations with Israel, Tunisia and Morocco. Shalom asked that the U.S. influence Morocco to renew an active dialogue with Israel, which has been sidelined since Hariri's assassination in February. He said that the GOI is discussing direct flights to Tunisia and the possibility of doing things in that country under the umbrella of UNESCO.

15. (C) A/S Welch advised Shalom to proceed carefully with Lebanon, because the government there is divided and needs to increase in confidence. He said that King Abdullah of Jordan seems determined to go ahead with reforms, despite the recent suicide bombing in Amman. A/S Welch noted that Abdullah had appointed a minister who formerly served in Israel, and there had been no reaction from the Arab press. This is a sign of progress, he said. On Iran, A/S Welch said that the Iranian president's statements on Israel are galvanizing further European disdain. He said that the current policy on the Iran nuclear issue is meeting with some success diplomatically, but the U.S. remains cautious.

MDA, Strategic Dialogue

16. (C) Shalom thanked the U.S. for its active support of the Third Protocol, adoption of which December 7 in Geneva paves the way for entry of Magen David Adom into the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement. A/S Welch commented that the strategic dialogue in Washington had been very successful and said that the U.S. is taking a serious look at a number of Israeli proposals, he said.

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JONES